

# Newsletter

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## Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

We are now nearing the end of another very successful season. We have the final print competition to go, our Annual Exhibition competition and some “more specialist” events also. My wife & I will soon be off to

Tenerife where my DSLR will get its first taste of foreign parts. Thereafter it will have to put up with Scotland, the Western Isles in June & later, in September, Bruce Collins & I will be on Skye.

Holidays are great times for seeing new places, meeting new people & recharging both self & camera batteries. Returning with hundreds of images which could, if not ruthlessly culled at the onset, end up on your hard drive, never to be seen again. But what do we do when the place we visit does not come up to our “pre-visualised” expectations? Do we just delete all our images? Do we say we’ll keep them just in case? In case of what? That they might just fit a “Set Subject” should a suitable one come along? I’ve been trying that for the last 12 years and it hasn’t worked yet!

A recent trip to a well known area on our South Coast did not wholly come up to expectations. I appreciate that you have to accept some *dereliction in the landscape* but what I found there was not expected. Even to those photographers who like the more contemporary shots it would have been a disappointment. But no, I have not deleted the 80 odd snaps I took that day but looked at them in a new light.

Could I use them to illustrate, in a cohesive panel, this particular place, its inhabitants & lifestyle. Would I have suitable & diverse enough snaps that could form the basis of a panel for our Clive Harrison Trophy competition? I think the answer is - Yes! Don’t get me wrong, I did get some nice shots that day that would stand up in their own right. But I won’t be in a hurry to rush back there again to restock the hard drive. I guess it was an exercise in accepting what I wasn’t wholly expecting & then making something of it. Perhaps it’s what is known as “a loss leader”?



## New Ventures

By Caroline Colegate

It’s holiday time again & therefore time for me to get that writing inspiration that seems to flow so easily when I am away from home. It’s a change this year, for the past two years I have sat writing my articles from a hotel terrace in Italy. Well this year it’s from Minneapolis airport where we have 7 hours to wait for our connecting flight to Billings. No, our original plans didn’t include such a long wait but things had to change when North West Airlines decided to cancel their afternoon flight & therefore we had to take the evening one. So here goes, what better way to while away dead time than by writing an article for the BCC Newsletter!

New Ventures - what do I mean? Well for me three main things.

Firstly, it is to approach places I visit with a different thought process. Why? Because I spend too little time *thinking* about the photo and *why* I am taking it when out ‘on location’. This was brought home to me last season when I used a picture of an Italian Cemetery. We had a good judge that night, Peter Jackman. I can still hear his words “looks like the photographer had the idea *after* they got home and has used the best available shot”. How right he was, if only I had *seen* the idea when I was in Italy I would have taken some different angles.

I would have gone much closer to the stepladder and used a wide angle lens to emphasise the idea of ascending to heaven. Using this choice of lens would also have enabled me to include more sky. As it was I had to create the impression of ascending to heaven so I copied the gravestone that was directly at the ....*/contd*



The top of the steps, skewed it as if it was like a flame and added my own smoke. I also desaturated the scene to create a more sombre feel but added a strong blue cast to the gravestone at the top of the steps and a strong red cast to the ascending skewed flame-like stone. This was the transition from the cold earth to the warmth of heaven. Of course I may well have done all these tweaks even if I have got the correct picture in the first place but the different angles would really have made the picture 'work'. As it is, it all looks a bit half hearted.

I have often claimed that when out picture taking I don't have time to think (pressures of having to move on quickly etc) but wait a minute, I go judging and therefore only have a few seconds to think before I need to start talking. Why don't I use those skills when I stand behind the camera? No, that doesn't mean I won't take pictures that wouldn't be suitable for club competition work (whatever club competition work means - but that's a whole subject in itself) but what I will try to do is a critique of why I am taking the picture before I press the shutter.

One of the best examples of what I mean is a picture that Minch took at an exhibition in London. Personally I think this is a fantastic photograph & it's one of my favourites. The look on the statues face is mirrored by the young girl, she has matching Romanesque features and her hair is styled in a complimentary way. Her hand is reaching up to touch the lips and it appears that they are just



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starting to part under the pressure of her fingers. To capture such perfection I would have thought that a lot of pre-planning had gone into taking the picture but Minch told me that he came across the statue and only had moments to find a suitable model, ask her if she would pose for him, take 4 quick photos and thank the girl for her assistance - BRILLIANT - now that's what I mean about 'seeing and thinking' rapidly. I wonder how many of us would have taken the statue, got home & thought now what I really need is a young girl reaching up to touch the face? To have the skill to see this picture at the taking stage is where I want to be.

Secondly, broad themes. I have lost count of the number of occasions I have gone to put a panel together for the Clive Harrison competition only to find, that in order to complete the story, the third or fourth vital image is missing. I guess I need some very wide themes. Bicycles are my current favourite and I have another theme that will take several trips to many different types of place to complete but I am not going to tell you what that one is just yet! I'll try to keep

those broad themes in mind wherever I go and maybe, just maybe I'll get some better panel work.

And thirdly, is to have a go at some different sorts of photography. From my previous articles you will have seen that I've recently had a go at Big Cats and Ascot 'people' pictures. There are times when I feel that many of us are guilty of sticking to what we are good at and not trying new ideas. It's all too comfortable to stick to our favourite subjects, but for me, it's time to move on.

So with those three things in mind how will I be approaching my USA holiday images?

Some broad themes will include putting things into their surroundings as well as going in close. For example, instead of just taking the close up of an alpine flower I will also include the whole meadow, some flowers in bud and some past their best. That would be a 'story' of that particular flower.

Another interesting theme would be to capture the contrast of the average American citizen who owns every mod con known to man with the wildness, vastness and vulnerability of the country in which they live. I am conscious that although one is often travelling on paved roads the weather can so easily turn into something that puts the human being at risk. They have *real* weather in the USA like tornados and violent storms, not the type of tame weather we have in the UK (until Climate Change takes its toll). It's quite amazing how abruptly busy towns with every facility suddenly end and you can travel tens of miles before seeing anything. There are few places like that in the UK. The American lifestyle is not harmonious with the landscape, at least not in the Western parts of the USA. This is not an easy subject to capture on film and not something I can complete in one holiday but I'll have a go at keeping this in my mind when taking my pictures and I'll have an excuse to go back to America in the future!

It will be an interesting experiment to see whether I come back with some different work and whether I will have overcome the frustration of looking at my pictures and saying "if only I had taken the shot to include X". I guess you could argue that digital would enable me to take more shots from every angle but I feel that with some subjects digital can sometimes hinder the *thinking* process. I would rather take 20 pictures and have 3 usable ones for a panel than take 50 images and still miss the vital shot merely because I was *snap happy*. I'm far from anti-digital but you still have to

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*see and think* the image and that's down to the photographer not the type of camera they are using.

So with themes and rapid critique processes running through my head it's time to board the flight; complete my journey to Billings but to begin a new journey with my picture taking.

P.S. And in case you are wondering why we are flying to somewhere nobody has heard of it's because Billings is only 100 miles from Yellowstone National Park where we will begin our holiday inside the world's biggest Super Volcano !



## Behind the Small Glass Window

by Charles Elsdon

Much can result from a chance remark, even one uttered in jest. My wife used to be a steward at the South Hill Park Arts Centre, and one Friday, she happened to be in the company of the cinema manager. He was a little overworked and said: "You wouldn't like to learn to run the films would you ?" "No" my wife replied, "but I know someone who would". When I learned of this, I followed it up almost at once. Unlike the stewards at South Hill Park who are unpaid, the projectionists are paid, not a fortune but for someone obliged to retire earlier than the state pension age & living in part off savings, a useful income supplement. I was quite open about having no experience or formal qualifications as a projectionist but was sure that I had more than sufficient background knowledge to learn and so it proved.

Thus I started my training. Of course the 35mm format that all but the youngest members will know was a cinema format before Leica made it a stills format as well. However, the culture shock was considerable. Think about it. 36 exposures of what we call full frame 35mm is 72 frames of standard cine film. At 24 frames per second, this would last just 3 seconds ! The precious film, thirty-six carefully composed pictures worth, auto focus points and metering options meticulously chosen and set, to give thirty-six photos from which to select and print (or project), all through the gate in three seconds !

The 35mm gauge has been the mainstay of the cinema for most of its history, but the use of the 18 x 24 mm standard cine frame has seen significant changes. In earlier times the aspect ratio was 4:3, as for standard television, and is known as "Acad", short for "academy", as in Academy Awards. We run comparatively few Acad films at SHP now. Historically, Cinemascope was next.

Cinemascope has an aspect ratio of 2.35:1, and uses anamorphic lenses in camera and projector. The angle of view of an anamorphic lens differs between the horizontal and vertical axes, so the image on a frame of Cinemascope film appears distorted, because the width of the picture, which would have to be 42mm to bring the height to 18mm if an ordinary lens were used, must be squashed down to 24mm. The projector's anamorphic lens, of course, reciprocates the camera lens, and projects an undistorted picture on the screen

Confusingly, the "Wide Screen" format has a smaller aspect ratio than cinemascope, and even more confusingly, there are two "wide screen" formats. The European "WS" aspect ratio is 1.66:1, and the American "WS" is 1.85:1. Both use ordinary lenses; the full height of the frame is not used. Sometimes the image on the film is to full height, and the mask in the projector (interchangeable) masks to the correct format.

*Charles will continue this fascinating look into the cinema in our next issue, due out in May. .... Ed*



## Landscape Photography (Part 3)

### "The Final Push"

By Ruari Cumming

Now, in the last of my trilogy on Landscape Photography, I know only too well how easy it is to "teach Grandma to suck eggs". That's not my intention and if it comes across as a "teach in" then I can only apologise now. This is just the way I go about capturing that all important image.

We can see the scene in our minds eye. All those weeks in the planning and all those days in reconnoitring are coming to fruition. Here we are on a warm September evening, after an exhausting but pleasurable day shooting scenes in the nearby fishing harbour. The sun is sinking regally behind the tall Corsican pines on the hillside to the west of our cottage. After downloading the days snaps onto my PSD <sup>1</sup> and reviewing them on the TV, I can re-format the CF card <sup>2</sup> ready for the next days shoot. The national weather forecast indicates it could be a cracker of a morning and this is further confirmed by the local weather report. Additionally, the tide will be favourable for my shot. Well, nothing ventured nothing gained !  
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As the target site is only about half a mile away, at Grid Ref 244229, I can walk there direct from the cottage, across the back of the dunes and then down onto the beach. Let's set ourselves up ready for an early start. I fill the light weight rucksack with an EOS 5D body, spare batteries and CF cards, plus three zoom lenses to cover a range from 17 mm through to 800 mm. Lee filters including bellows hood, warm ups, polariser and 'soft edged' graduated neutral densities. Cable release, spirit level and a lens cleaning cloth. Some warm clothing such as ski hat, fingerless mittens and a small towel to dry my feet if they get wet. I still have space so I drop in my EOS 1VHS & a couple of rolls of Fuji Velvia 50. Why you ask? Well I have yet to find a company who can produce slides from digital files that come anyway near to what the original slide film can produce. I will also take my waterproof walking boots and a tripod - I'm lucky enough to have a Gitzo carbon fibre tripod which is very light but strong. Now for the important stuff. Set the alarm for 5.30 a.m. and polish off a large glass of Scotch!

"Beep, beep, beep" squawks the alarm. Through the window the day is dawning and looks just fine. Quick coffee & on with coat and rucksack; picking up tripod, off I go. I really do like the early mornings with that clear crispness, the call of birds and a warming breeze in my face. Down the road and turning left to take a shortcut across the deserted golf course. Along the back of the dunes to well north of my target site. If you are going to take early morning shots of a deserted beach it is a shame to spoil the foreground with footprints. Slowly moving to where I have judged the best position to be, I glance around to see if I missed anything during my reconnaissance.

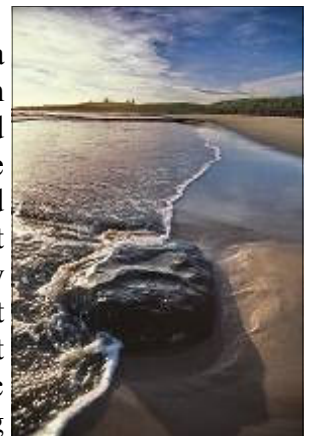
Erecting tripod and pushing it's legs firmly into the wet sand. I hang the rucksack from beneath it to add more stability and keep it off the wet sand. Out comes the 5D body and slips easily into the Gitzo quick release plate on a 3 way head. Then fitting the cable release & the spirit level slotted into the hot shoe. You would be surprised how, even when you can't see an horizon, you can have the camera at an annoying slant which still gives the perception of not being level. I keep the spirit level fitted at all times when taking shots with the tripod or monopod. Now for a lens. To start with I want to use the 17 mm end with the camera in portrait format. Like this I can get in the castle on the skyline as well as the rippling striations of the wet sand in the immediate foreground. Providing I am careful and don't include the tripod legs or my boots! As the EOS 1VHS viewfinder gives a 100% view it's easy spot this but the 5D, despite being a

"full frame" camera, only has a 96% viewfinder.

I suppose I should now tell you where I am! Well I'm standing on the beach, some 200 yards out from the dunes towards the sea, at Embleton on the Northumbria coast, looking south towards Dunstanburgh Castle. As the sand is wet and the blue sky has white scudding clouds, my intention is to get shots in both portrait & landscape format with the sand dominating some and the sky dominating others. Talking of skies, it pays to decide whether the sky adds anything to a picture or not and if not then try to exclude it. It's also a good idea to take pictures of just good cloud effects in the sky, as you never know when you'll need one to "import" digitally to another snap. Now, if I want to take both digital and slides I had better get a shift on!

I will go through a number of items to check. I'll compose my picture, ensuring the camera is set level. Set exposure mode to aperture priority & at around f16 or more. Point the lens to a position approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> into the shot, set the distance & then switch off the autofocus to "fix" the depth of field before re-composing. If the greater part of the picture is lighter than the rest, normally by more than 2 stops, I'll need a graduated neutral density filter in place to even out the exposure. By holding a polariser up to my eye and turning it, to see what effect it has, is a good way of deciding whether to use it or not. Then a very careful and slow look around all the edges of the viewfinder for any unwanted intrusions. Finally, holding a small piece of black card in one hand, just behind the viewfinder to stop stray light changing the settings, & the cable release in my other hand, I look at my scene to await the finite moment before making *the final push* on the shutter button.

That done, now starts a rapid repeat of all this with changes to format and composition! Then a change to the film camera body and another set of shots all at varied shutter speeds (my form of bracketing). And it doesn't stop there as the light changes & more atmospheric shots appear with differing angles, lenses, cameras, positions & formats. This is the time when I feel it's all been so worth while and I say to myself "**marvellous !!**"



<sup>1</sup> Portable Storage Device. I use an Epson P4000 & it's very good. See <http://www.epson.co.uk>. There are cheaper ones.

<sup>2</sup> Compact Flash Card - I tend to use 1 & 2 Gb sized cards just in case of a card becoming corrupted & buy competitively priced SanDisk Extreme III from Photo-Scotland - see <http://www.photo-scotland.co.uk> who also sell PSDs.